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Mr. CLEVELAND

A Personal Impression

Jesse Lynch Williams



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Mr. CLEVELAND



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MR. CLEVELAND AND HIS
YOUNGEST SON, FRANCIS

Mr. CLEVELAND

A Personal Impression

By

Jesse Lynch Williams



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MR. CLEVELAND

A Personal Impression

So much has been written about Grover Cleveland, whom the world admired, and so little about Mr. Cleveland, whom his friends loved, that it is right, now that this great figure has passed into history, to tell of that side of his life and personality revealed to those who had the privilege of knowing this man as a private citizen and a good neighbor, rather than as a public personage and a great statesman.

For except that he was given to shooting ducks and passed his mellow latter years in serene, academic seclusion, there is less known about the human side of this President than of any public character our country has pro-

duced. While he was with us those who knew him kept silent, out of regard for his own habitual reserve. Now that he is gone, however, they should speak, out of equally sincere regard for his memory. For the public forms its opinions of the private side of public characters whether the latter like it or not. It is the penalty of fame. And those who like it least and try hardest to retain the simple luxury of privacy are the ones to suffer most.

The lies about Mr. Cleveland's singularly beautiful home life—such preposterous lies that they would seem amusing to those who knew, if they had not been so painful to those whom they concerned—are no longer believed, I suppose, by any one. But the effect of this upon a man by nature extremely reserved, yet possessed of a

delicacy of feeling which few people understood, was to increase a strange physical shyness, of which the world never suspected this great rugged figure. It resulted in an abnormal shrinking from public gaze, which was sometimes misconstrued, but which persisted all through his life and was felt even in the last rites in death. His funeral, more private than that of many an ordinary citizen, was so dramatically simple, indeed, that the representatives of foreign Powers present could hardly conceal their surprise, and the representatives of the press could not understand why they were excluded from the obsequies of the nation's ex-President.

I

THE quality which impressed one most on becoming acquainted with Mr.

Cleveland was not his greatness—one had anticipated that; but his genial kindliness and his quiet, pervasive humor. He even had charm. These characteristics I, for one, had not anticipated at all. I had pictured him, as many perhaps still see him, a gruff, old warrior, resting after his battles, brooding over the past; silent, except when stirred occasionally to pronouncing a polysyllabic profundity; august, austere, a personage difficult to know and impossible to love. I expected to admire him, but it never occurred to me that one might like him; still less that he might care to be liked by those among whom he had cast his lot.

I think every one who had a chance to know him must have felt affection for him. Sam, his coachman, used to say: "The finest Dimmycrat I ever knew.

I'm a Republican." The evening after Mr. Cleveland's funeral he said: "I could hardly drive for the tears runnin' down me face. The finest man I ever knew, Dimmycrat or Republican!"

The atmosphere of greatness—that subtle emanation of real power—was always present, always felt, more so than in the case of any man I ever met. So often it evaporates when once you have seen enough to disassociate the man from the name. But there was nothing gruff or severe about this pleasant, simple-mannered, large-framed man, comfortably seated by his library fireplace, saying little, but listening carefully, sympathetically in fact, to all that was being said, with a ready smile for whatever might be amusing, a kindly solicitude for the comfort of your seat and a grave carefulness in the

selection of your cigar. "Well, I guess there's no law against our smoking," was his frequent phrase. He seemed, as a friend once remarked, "just as much interested in giving me a good time as I was in trying to entertain him."

But no one, not even the most intimate, thought of being familiar with him. He always insisted upon carrying his gun-case himself when making the annual pilgrimage, and upon drawing lots for position on the shooting grounds; but he also insisted upon due respect to the high office he had held. Some of the numerous invitations to address quasi-important gatherings annoyed him: "They've got nerve to expect a former President to attend their show." He did not say "me," but "a former President."

His voice in conversation was a lit-

tle higher than one would expect from such a large man. It was undoubtedly what foreigners would call an American voice, somewhat nasal, though not unpleasant, and with something in it that reminded me of the way I supposed Lincoln's voice sounded. When he referred to his old friends and associates, there was tenderness in it, as he pronounced their names,—"Joe" Jefferson or "Tom" Bayard, and others, less known to fame, but equally dear to him. The world only heard of the famous ones, but it never occurred to him to arrange his friendships on any basis but the real one—or that his more obscure chums were not just as interesting to quote and tell about.

An old gunner, an interesting character who used to take the ex-President shooting, appeared at the gates

of Westland on the morning of the funeral. He, like the rest of the public, was refused admission by the guard. "But I've *got* to get in. He was my best friend. I've got to *see* him!"

"Well, you can go up to the house," the guard finally said, to humor him, "but they won't let you in."

When his name and his request reached Mrs. Cleveland she at once sent down word to admit him, and a few minutes later he was seen leaving Westland with tears running down his tanned cheeks. He had taken his last look at the features of his best friend. The only person outside of the circle of relatives, neighbors and intimates to see the dead face was this weather-beaten old gunner.

Great men are so often great bores, —admirable, but interesting chiefly as

curiosities. Friendship seldom thrives on greatness. It takes two to make a quarrel or a friendship. It requires giving as well as receiving. Greatness is apt to consume the capacity for real friendship. Mr. Cleveland, however, was one of those who made and kept real friends. He set great store by them. He liked to be with them. Naturally, they liked to be with him—not, however, because it was an honor and a privilege and a liberal education, merely, but because he was such good company.

He was not a great talker. Once in a while something would start him going, and he would run on for half an evening with reminiscences and comments on men and events,—wonderful talk which ought to have been recorded even if never printed,—but for

the most part he let others do the talking; he listened. Like many men of attainment, though not all, he was a most inspiring listener, with a flattering manner of regarding you while talking as if your views upon the topic of conversation were quite as worthy of attention as his own. He really thought so. He was the most immoderately modest of men, as nearly devoid of vanity as it is safe for a human to be. He took an honest pride in the work he had done for his country, but he knew he was not brilliant, and thought he had no unusual gifts —he was right; there was nothing extraordinary about his qualities, except the degree to which he had developed them, and perhaps the proportion in which he possessed them.

His grave quietness, however, was

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[redacted]

[redacted]

amazed by this bolt out of the blue to say anything. The man came nearer. "I tell you," he repeated, panting from his rapid rowing, "President McKinley has been shot—killed!"

Mr. Cleveland scrutinized the stranger a moment in grave silence, betraying nothing of what he thought or felt. Then making a sign to show that he had heard and appreciated what the man wished to say, his gaze dropped to his line again, though of course he was not thinking of fishing now. The bearer of bad tidings looked at the apparently stolid figure of the silent fisherman. "You don't seem to be much excited about it," he muttered, and putting about rowed slowly to shore.

Mr. Cleveland waited a little while still in profound silence, then thoughtfully reeling in his line, he merely said

to his friend. "Well, I guess we may as well go." On the way to shore he disjointed his rod in his careful, deliberate manner, put it in the case, still saying nothing. At the landing he was met by the nearest local correspondent for a New York newspaper, also quite excited and not a little embarrassed by his unwelcome assignment. "I'm sorry to trouble you, sir," he said, "but my paper wants me to get two hundred words from you on the assassination of the President."

Mr. Cleveland at first shook his head. "Say this," he finally answered, "that in common with all decent, patriotic American citizens I am so horrified by this *report* that I am unable to say anything." Then turning hastily away he drove off with his friend, and for some time said nothing even to

him, as the carriage jolted over the hilly roads and the sunset faded. Then suddenly as if they had been talking all the time, he said aloud, "Well, it may not be true." Presently he added, "It may be true that he has been shot; it may not be true that he has been killed" (which proved to be the case). After that there was still a longer silence until finally just before the end of the drive—it was now quite dark—he began to talk (and note the extraordinary prescience of the conclusion he reached as a result of his slow, silent brooding upon the momentous tidings): First of all, he said, if the report were true the thing could hardly have been done by a disappointed office-seeker as in the case of "poor Garfield;" the circumstances at the time were not such as to make that

probable. Nor, he explained, was it likely that labor troubles could have been the immediate cause; there were no strikes of importance on at the time. Other possible causes and agencies were passed in review and cast aside as possible, but hardly probable. "So," he added quietly, but with the divination of a seer of old, "if McKinley has been shot, there is no other explanation than that it has been by the hand of some *foreign anarchist.*" And within a few hours he was reliably informed that this precisely was the case!

Later, when Mr. McKinley died, the whole world, including, no doubt, the stranger in the rowboat, was surprised and touched at the depth of feeling shown by this rugged old statesman in his public utterance concerning the Nation's great calamity.

Another example of his unconscious "trick of silence" in a different mood may suggest a little of the quiet, pervasive humor his friends knew and liked. One of his neighbors who dropped in to smoke with him one evening, said: "By the way, Mr. Cleveland, let me show you a new way to cut your cigar, a more hygienic way;" and he illustrated it. "First you start as if you were going to cut the end off in the usual manner, but stop halfway through, like this. Then begin at the very tip, you see, and cut straight in, so, until you strike the other cut; remove the segment thus formed, and now you have not only a greater drawing area, but also, by holding the cigar in your mouth this side up, there is formed a sort of cup which catches all the nicotine." Mr. Cleveland listened

with grave interest until his good friend had quite finished, then without a word or a smile, he picked up a cigar, snipped off the entire end in the old accustomed manner, and set to smoking with great satisfaction and no audible comment.

Once these two were angling for a very large bass which had been seen several times lurking near a certain rock. The professor suddenly got him on his hook, but lost him. "Naturally," said the other fisherman, addressing the bass, "you did n't care to be caught by a mere amateur, you were just waiting for the master hand;" and presently, sure enough, the same big fellow got on Mr. Cleveland's hook. "What did I tell you?" he remarked, carefully playing the fish; "he was just waiting for the master"—But at that point the bass wriggled off again. Mr. Cleve-

land gazed thoughtfully at the water for a moment, then shot a twinkling glance at his companion, straightway turned his face away again and proceeded to fish in silence.

In a copy of his "Shooting and Fishing Sketches," which he presented to a young friend whose profession was writing, he penned this inscription: "To —— —— ——, with apologies, from Grover Cleveland." The young man's delight, by the way, at possessing an autograph copy was almost equalled by his perplexity in acknowledging it. He could not ignore the inscription and it seemed impossible to answer it. "Write a note saying 'Your apologies are accepted!'" suggested a friend.

Mr. Cleveland's humor was distinctly of the American type—at least

what foreigners call the American type. One of his favorite stories was of the farmer who wanted so much to commit suicide that in order to make sure of it he loaded a revolver, tied a rope to the limb of a tree overhanging a deep river, slipped a noose around his neck, and pushed out into the middle of the stream. But when he kicked the boat out from under him the jar discharged the revolver, the shot cut the rope, he was dumped into the water —"and if I had n't been able to swim," said the farmer, "I might have drowned."

He was fond of telling about the time he reproved his dear old friend Joe Jefferson for jerking a fish and thus losing him. "Why did you jerk that fish?" he demanded, and Mr. Jefferson turned with a whimsical look

of reproach, and said: "He jerked me first."

It also amused him to relate the incident of the old negro aunty down on Mr. Jefferson's plantation in Louisiana. "There was only one picture in her cabin, and it happened to be one of me—from some newspaper. 'Who is that?' asked Joe. 'I don't jes remember, suh, but I reckon it's John the Baptist.'"

At the formal opening of the St. Louis Exposition in 1903, where the ex-President and the President made addresses, they were both guests at a dinner given by Governor Francis to twenty-four distinguished personages. The President sat on the host's right and the ex-President on his left. The one talked interestingly and the other listened interestedly and for the most

part in silence; until toward the end of the dinner, turning to the vigorous young President for whom he cherished a considerate regard, despite radical differences in temperament and opinion, he remarked: "Young man, do you realize that I'm old enough to be your father?" and he added in the same quietly jocose manner, "Do you realize that after you get through being president, you've got to come back and take your place in the ranks with the rest of us?"

The President's attitude toward his predecessor, it should be added, was always that of filial respect. "You know I always feel toward your husband," he once whispered to Mrs. Cleveland when they met at a football game, "as a freshman toward a senior."

One more instance of his latent hu-

mor and of the unexpected way it was always cropping out. One day as he and a neighbor were starting off for an afternoon stroll, the ex-President stopped a moment to glance at some plumbers at work on the leaders of a wing of his house,—for it is a sad thought, or if you choose, a comforting one, that even former presidents are not exempt from plumbers. Turning to his friend he remarked gravely, "I wonder how it would look to put another story on this wing."

"Oh, were you thinking of doing that?" asked his companion with innocent surprise. "Why?"

"We could have more bedrooms," Mr. Cleveland replied reflectively.

"Do you really want more bedrooms?"

"Well, you see," he answered, still

within hearing of the plumbers now working industriously, "they're around here all the time, so they might as well sleep here. It would save them the walk." Then talking of other matters he went on with his stroll.

II

AFTER the first surprise at finding him genial and approachable, the abiding impression of this man's personality was his plain honesty. Of this trait, to be sure, everyone was aware, but the degree to which his sense of truth was developed seems abnormal.

"He was the honestest man I ever knew," as a certain distinguished lawyer said who had known Mr. Cleveland long and intimately. It seemed to be an innate quality and manifested itself early in life. not an acquired char-

acteristic as with many children who turn out to be good men after all. It was the only precocious thing about him as a child. He could hardly have been more than four or five years old when one day he was found crying bitterly because a pedler who had visited the house had accidently dropped a pair of suspenders and was now too far down the road for the little fellow to catch up with him and return them.

The story of the neighborly hen who persisted in laying eggs in the Rev. Mr. Cleveland's yard has already been told. The boy Grover soberly carried them back to the neighbor's house each day, and finally made such a fuss about it that the hen had to be suppressed.

Truth was a passion with him, almost a mania. One of his friends tells a story to the point. Mr. Cleveland had

been relating his first experience in killing a salmon; the guide had given him the usual admonition that when a fish struck he must keep his thumb off the reel until the fish swallowed the hook. Presently a beautiful fish struck, and struck hard, but flopped off.

"I told you to keep your thumb off the reel," said the guide.

"I didn't have my thumb on the reel," was the reply.

"But," he added in relating the story, "I oughtn't to have said that; I'm afraid my thumb grazed the reel. I've thought of it again and again; it wasn't right for me to contradict him. The guide couldn't answer back;" and he actually looked as troubled about it as if it had happened that morning instead of years ago. No further reference was made to the story by either

of them until suddenly a couple of days later Mr. Cleveland said, "I 'd like to show you just how my thumb was with reference to that reel," and he illustrated with his rod.

"Well, if that was the position," said his friend, "it did n't tighten the line in the least, and you were all right."

The other thought it over a moment. "I hope so," he said, "I hope so."

The democratic mode of his private life is sometimes spoken of as if an ideal to which he consciously adhered. With him it was a good deal more than a well-followed creed; it was a spontaneous expression of his personality, due to his inherent honesty. He liked simple things because he was simple. He was of the soil. He had but few forms, though these he ob-

served strictly and expected others to observe. The inevitable vanities and artificialities of a highly organized stage of society were not wrong, but distasteful to *him*. He felt their incongruity with himself. In short, he had humor—not the chirping facetiousness of the generation which prates to an unhumorous extent about its sense of humor, but the real thing, the inner vision of truth which is the beginning of wisdom and its end.

He liked and enjoyed all the real things of life and despised the unreal. That was why he had real friends. Only a few people, even obscure ones, have real friends in their old age. But among the great, history shows a still smaller proportion so blessed. It is apt to be lonely on the heights.

That was one keynote of his char-

acter, but along with his simple love of truth there existed a cognate quality which, however, does not always accompany it; and that was an active sense of responsibility to some power higher than ourselves. In one of those rare moments in his usually light conversation when he broke through his habitual reserve and showed what he thought about deeply, he once said to a friend: "I don't see how a democratic people, struggling and fighting for its needs and desires, can continue to exist as a free people without the idea of something invisible above them to which they believe themselves accountable."

Like all great truths, this has been said before. The point here is that he believed it, and that in these two fundamental qualities, the vision of truth

and the sense of one's unshirkable accountability, and in courage, which was their offspring, are to be found the determining motives of his life.

III

MR. CLEVELAND'S daily life in Princeton has often been described—sometimes correctly. Eight o'clock was the sacred hour for breakfast. His mail occupied most of the morning, and sometimes the whole day; for the secretary often referred to in despatches from Princeton did not exist, and he liked to attend to things himself, except when Mrs. Cleveland insisted upon helping him. Sometimes he called in a stenographer from among the students, but he wrote an astonishing number of letters with his own hand. On the occasion of his seventieth

birthday he was overwhelmed with letters of congratulation. He gave up a fishing trip he had planned and answered all the personal ones himself, saying: "If these fellows care enough to write to me, the least I can do is to write to them."

After luncheon, which was at half-past one, he received some callers and declined to receive some others. A good part of his time was spent in defending himself from the importunities of those who wanted him to make addresses, write sentiments, introduce books, or boom enterprises. He always treated them gently as long as he could; declined unwelcome requests so considerately, in fact, that sometimes persistent persons, who did not appreciate his well-known obstinacy, were misled and tried to persuade him

against his will. Then he got angry at their presumption, demolished them, and sent them about their business.

His aversion to being interviewed was well known. He enjoyed talking to newspaper men — but not often for publication. Indeed, he was far more accessible than most of them seemed to realize, and often discussed great questions with great freedom; but when they asked, "Can I print any of this?" he would be apt to shake his head, or dictate a formal sentence or two, and have it repeated verbatim. To one young man who kept on trying to get the ex-President's opinion of how Mr. McKinley was attending to his own business with regard to Porto Rico, Mr. Cleveland finally replied: "That, sir, is a matter of too great importance to discuss in a five-

minute interview, now rapidly drawing to its close."

In the afternoon he would take a drive or a walk. He hated to walk. Dr. Bryant told him he ought to; but he said the doctor did not know what he was talking about.

Dean West, who walked with him most frequently, sometimes had to trap him into it. He would call at the house and send up word that it was a fine day for a walk. An answer would come back that it was "utterly impossible—Mr. Cleveland was too busy." The professor would wait in the hall. Presently Mr. Cleveland, fearing that he had hurt his good friend's feelings, would come out of the room and peer down over the balustrade. "Which way are you going?" he would call. "Yes, sir," the professor would an-

swer, taking pains not to commit himself. "Well," the voice would come down, "if you 're going by the post-office, I will go that far with you,—I have an important letter to mail,—but not a step farther. I'm all worn out and I'm very busy."

Then, when the post-office was reached, "Just a block more," would be suggested, and finally they would go on down past Carnegie Lake for a good two hours' stroll, and often the ex-President would enjoy it very much; but would abuse his friend soundly for it afterward to the doctor, sometimes making an open accusation of their entering into a conspiracy with Mrs. Cleveland against his peace and happiness.

Sometimes after his walk he would take a cup of tea in the library with

Mrs. Cleveland and the others who might have dropped in, provided they were among those who dropped in often, for meeting new people was irksome to him. Once, when he was starting out for a walk, a gushing lady from out of town caught him. She told him how glad she was to see him, how much better he looked than the last time she saw him, how glad her husband would be to know that she had seen him, and how much it would mean to her children when she told them she had seen him. He waited gravely until she had finished, then bowed sedately, turned home, and could not be persuaded to take a walk again for a week.

His aversion to experiences of that sort was intense. One day, while fishing with a few friends in his launch off Gray Gables, a stranger approached in

another launch, and, discovering Mr. Cleveland, proceeded to circle around, staring at close range. Not only was the one stared at miserably bored, but the fishing was spoiled for his guests. On the third lap around the stranger's launch broke down. There was nothing for him to do now but row home, four miles away, against a head wind, while the guests in the other boat rejoiced in silence. Mr. Cleveland watched the man's futile efforts for a moment, then said, "Well, Brad, I guess we 'd better give him a lift." For once the faithful old Brad did not obey with alacrity. "Oh, it 's the only thing to do," said Mr. Cleveland. So Brad drew near, tossed out a line, and towed the crimson-faced intruder across the bay, while the ex-President sat in the stern, with his back to the stranger,

smoking gravely and saying nothing.

After dinner he played billiards and did most of his writing, nearly always ending the evening with a game of cribbage with Mrs. Cleveland or some of the neighbors. He was a very good cribbage player, but an indifferent billiard shot. After giving his guest the best cue, he usually managed to get the crookedest one in the rack for himself, one with a worn-out, hardened tip. But he tried hard and played with a sober, melancholy earnestness, watching each shot as if it were the most important matter in the world.

In cribbage Commodore Benedict was his most famous opponent. These two had kept score of their games together for many years. At the time of Mr. Cleveland's death Mr. Benedict was in the lead. On the morning after

the funeral this devoted old friend sent for the well-worn cribbage-board over which they had leaned so often, and, summoning one of Mr. Cleveland's younger friends with whom he had often played the game in his latter days, said: "We will play one game together in memory of 'the Admiral'" (his name for Mr. Cleveland), adding: "I think that is what he would like us to do." And so these two—the old opponent and the young one—seated under an apple tree on the Cleveland property, silently played the game through to the finish, and the young man won.

IV

To the last, even after he was obliged to give up shooting and fishing, he was fond of talking about it with others. He would tell with a reminis-

cent twinkle of the time he was persuaded to try a big eight-bore gun for brant, and was almost kicked out of the blind by the recoil. "I don't know what happened to the brant, but I found myself in a heap at the bottom of the blind." He would tell of the time he shot a certain rare bird under unusual conditions. "Well, I got that bird, but it was n't fair,—it was n't fair." He manifested interest for the first time in a young caller when the latter happened to remark that in his opinion the black duck was not generally appreciated. "That 's right," declared Mr. Cleveland warmly, "one of the finest birds that fly. They are not appreciated because they have n't a fine-sounding name like 'canvasback.' But they taste as good and are a great deal smarter. I tell you, when a fellow gets a right

and left on black ducks, he's doing about as good shooting as any one can ask. Aren't they great fellows for towering up in the air just as you rise to shoot!"

Though he did not say so he had made more than one such double himself. He was a fine duck shot. He was not so skilful at quail. "They're too quick for me," he would say. For though ducks fly faster, the sportsman can generally see them coming. The great temptation is to shoot before they are within range. "Good waiting" is a prime requisite of the art. But with quail whirring up in the thick woods there is no time to wait. Duck shooting requires deliberation and calm judgment; quail shooting dash and instinctive action. President Roosevelt, if he shot small game, ought to be better at quail

than was Mr. Cleveland, while the latter should be better at ducks than Mr. Roosevelt. The symbolism may be taken for what it is worth. Every temperament has the qualities of its defects.

Once "while in Washington," to use the ex-President's phrase for being President, he brought home a number of wild swans he had shot down South, and sent one as a compliment to each member of his Cabinet and to some of his other associates. "Well, all the boys thanked me politely for remembering them, but none of them seemed to have much to say about how they enjoyed the birds. Carlisle, I found, had his cooked on a night when he was dining out. Another, when I asked him, said he hoped I would n't mind, but he had sent it home to his old mo-

ther. Thurber did n't mention his bird at all for two days. Finally I asked him about it. 'Thurber, did you get that swan all right?'

"'Yes, sir, oh, yes, I got the swan all right, thank you,' and he bent over his desk, and seemed to be very busy.

"'Fine bird,' I said.

"'Yes, sir, fine bird,' and went on working.

"'Enjoy eating him, Thurber?'

"He waited a minute," then he said, 'Well, sir, I guess they did n't cook him right at my house. They cooked him only two days,' and he went on working without cracking a smile."

Mr. Cleveland resented the lies about the enormous bags he brought home from shooting, even more, apparently, than misrepresentations of his political acts; at least, he seemed



to cherish the resentment longer. The other lies ceased to be believed. "I'm no pot-hunter," he used to say with spirit, "and I never was."

In his strolls about Princeton he always took appreciative note of the points of any bird-dog that he might happen to see; and once when a caller was followed into the library at "Westland" by a too devoted Irish setter the hospitable master of the house protested against the efforts of the owner to put the dog out. "No, no, he does n't want to wait out in the cold while we are in here enjoying ourselves. Let him stay, let him stay. I always like a good dog;" and the setter seeming to understand, as setters often do, walked across the room with considerable dignity, settled himself comfortably at the feet of the master of Westland,

and with his muzzle on the floor looked up and blinked jeeringly at his owner.

Mr. Cleveland watched with fond pride the budding of the sportsman's instinct in his son, and he used to tell how "up there at Tamworth that boy will lie on the bridge half a day to catch one or two small trout,"—patience and carefulness, as he often said, being the supreme qualities for the true fisherman.

On the opening of the rabbit season these two would make an expedition to a friend's farm at Rocky Hill, three miles from Princeton, and there the boy had his first real shooting, coached and encouraged by his father. It was all very simple and informal, like a rabbit shoot by any other American father and son, quite different from a "drive"

in the royal preserves abroad; and it was hard for the other children in the family to understand the elaborate descriptions of the day's sport in some of the city papers. They tried their best, however. "The hounds from the Cleveland kennels," one of them read aloud; and then after a moment's thought exclaimed: "Why, that must mean old Brownie!"

V

THOUGH he knew only a few of them intimately, Mr. Cleveland showed a close interest in his fellow townsmen. It would probably amaze some of them to be told how much he knew about them. He had an orthodox neighborly spirit of the old-fashioned kind, was concerned in the affairs of the young people, and could not see

why So-and-So did not make a match with So-and-So.

He knew far more, too, about the undergraduates than they were aware of. They seldom saw him, except occasionally at a baseball game or in his strolls about the country, for he usually avoided the village streets—perhaps he was afraid of meeting gushing ladies of the sort mentioned. But he knew what was going on, and he was especially interested in those who were working their way through college. He had all sorts of ways of finding out how they were faring, and more than one of them has the late ex-President to thank, directly or indirectly, for finding the means of paying his expenses while getting his diploma. There was one young man who needed two hundred dollars to get through the

year. Mr. Cleveland sent for him and told him that his library was in sore need of cataloguing. So the young man worked for a few days, and received a check for one hundred dollars. That was half of what he needed. A month or two later Mr. Cleveland mixed the books up a little and had the student do it over again. Thus the young man received his two hundred dollars and retained his self-respect.

It was one of the "old customs" for the freshmen to march around to Westland on the night after they became sophomores; also for the entire student body to ask him for a few long words of congratulation whenever they won an athletic championship. Mr. Cleveland generally heard them coming, and usually tried to get out of it. "Oh, let 'em think I 'm out

of town," or "Tell them I'm too busy;" but he always went out and spoke to them, and I think he was pleased that they wanted to come.

On his seventieth birthday the undergraduates presented him with an enormous silver loving-cup, the spokesman holding it as he would a bag of bats. I never heard Mr. Cleveland say so, but I fancy he valued it even more than he did the gold cup which some of his Princeton friends gave him upon the same happy occasion.

Except for one or two places, he never dined out if he could help it. "But I dined there once!" he would say in an injured tone as if he thought that ought to score him off. But when induced to go he enjoyed it after all, and delighted scared young matrons with his amiability and his interest in

their opinions. As one of them put it: "He talked to me as if what I had to say interested him!" Probably it did. He was not the kind to smile blandly at women or ask condescendingly: "And how's the baby?"

His interest in the college itself was, of course, keen, and he took the affairs of the little academic world quite as seriously, if not as frantically, as some of the rest of us, even to wanting Princeton to win every time in athletics. Like many modest men who have not happened to experience a formal academic training, he manifested great regard for the erudition of those who had—unless they attempted to impose upon him with it. Then he saw through them instantly and never forgot it. It may sound odd, but he seemed really to think himself highly

honored when asked to serve on the Board of Trustees, though the gowns and gorgeousness of the academic processions may not have seemed to him indispensable to the "plain living and high thinking" of a rural university. However, he regarded the office as a trust as well as an honor, and gave it more hard thinking than some of those who were not as yet ex-Presidents. He did not enjoy being treated differently from "the rest of the boys," as he called his fellow members of the board. At the Commencement exercises the president of the university used to seat Mr. Cleveland (looking gently resigned) at the right of the university throne—an ornate baldachino, which the unappreciative undergraduates term "the buggy." "I stuck it out while Patton was there,"



Mr. Cleveland remarked one day in his whimsically plaintive voice; "but when Wilson came in I struck. I told him I was n't going to do that any more—I wanted to sit with the rest of the boys," and he did thereafter.

One thing which helped to mislead the outside world as to the essential simplicity of Mr. Cleveland's nature was the heavy, involved style of many, though not all, of his writings and public utterances. It was so different from the easy idiomatic colloquialism of his conversation. In his writings he invented several famous phrases such as "innocuous desuetude" and "the restless rich." In conversation he was given to more homely expressions. He was fond of old saws, such as "There!" (when playing cribbage) "I knew I'd get my head into a bag;" or, when

something of a confidential nature was related to him, "Well, I'll put that in the back of my head where there is n't any mouth." This apparent incongruity can of course be partly explained by the simple fact that when expressing himself formally he was writing in obedience to the instinct of a trained lawyer and with a view to his official responsibility as a statesman. Moreover, the influence of the sonorous English of the Bible and his father's sermons doubtless had their effect when he approached the task of writing; whereas when engaged in informal conversation he was a man merely talking to other humans, most of whom he had to put at ease. There may, however, be another cause which helps to explain this and many other things about Mr. Cleveland not gen-

erally understood: his innate shyness. No public character ever hated publicity more. Writing is essentially a public performance. Unconsciously, perhaps, he hid behind his style. This may help to account for the fact that when under stress of deep feeling his style was more direct and clear, his sentences more terse and simple. On the other hand, it is well known that he was not in the least perturbed when it came to public speaking. (This is often the case with shy natures.) It was not what he himself had to say, but what others might say to him that disturbed him.

As in everything he undertook, Mr. Cleveland was a most careful worker when he wrote. Whether it was a public address, a political essay, or a shooting sketch, he never began the actual,

painful process of writing until after a period of careful brooding on the subject. Then came a mood of strong aversion to the task. He hated to write it out. "I was a fool to undertake this. I might have known I'd get my head in a bag. I have n't *time* to do these things. I don't *know* enough!" and so on until he finally made himself get at it, saying, "Well, this is the last time I'll ever do anything of *this* sort." Then when at last the plunge was made, cheerfully and patiently he forged each sentence through to the end. And when the end was reached, his revisions, though careful and numerous, were almost never structural, —merely verbal and phrasal. He often amplified a little, but the framework invariably remained as was first planned.

"I'm afraid it's pretty bad," he used

to say dejectedly to Mrs. Cleveland, or any other he might chance to consult when the work in hand was finished.

"Why don't you read it aloud?" would be suggested.

"No, I don't want to take your time."

"At least won't you read the introduction?"

And then when that was read he would go on to the end. He felt much better about it after that.

He once spoke of the care with which he prepared his messages at Washington. Usually he was days doing them. He kept them by him in a convenient drawer of his desk at the White House, taking them out from time to time, to make annotations, to show them to Mr. Carlisle or others.

He never did anything hastily if he could help it, though he could perform huge tasks at a single sitting when under pressure. The celebrated Venezuelan message was a case in point. On the evening of his return from the fishing trip (for which he was so severely criticized) Secretary Olney dined with him and they talked the Venezuela matter over until half-past ten. Then he sat down and wrote until half-past four in the morning, sent his manuscript to the stenographer, revised it by breakfast time, and at ten o'clock despatched it to the Capitol. But he had been thinking about it all through his fishing trip. That was why he took the trip, to get away from the turmoil and see things clearly in perspective.

He was one of the hardest and

steadiest toiling presidents we have ever had work for us. From nine A.M. to two A.M. was his regular shift, with time only for meals and similar semi-official and not always restful diversions. But on many other occasions than the one described he was still at his desk, working his way painstakingly through a mass of papers when the sun looked in through the windows of the East Room.

"Did n't you ever have trouble getting to sleep after working at that rate?" I once asked him.

"No," he smiled, "my only trouble was to keep awake."

VI

MR. CLEVELAND'S mental processes were slow, laborious, thorough. He worked awkwardly. Like most of us,

he hated to get to work; like some of us he hated to stop. He was a most persistent worker, as he was a most persistent sportsman. No one could ever accuse *him* of jerking a bass. His eye was on the line all the time. And while duck shooting, when the morning flight was over and the rest of the party, sleepy from their early dawn start, wanted to go back to the house at noon, he would stay in the blind, watching for the stray single or double. Once one of his companions fell asleep beside him, and, when about to fall out of the blind into the water, was rescued by the ex-President, who never ceased to joke him about it. On the "rest days" (certain days of the week when the state laws provide a rest for the ducks) he played high-low-jack and the game—not for an

hour or two, but all day long, from breakfast to bedtime! One by one he would tire out the rest of the party at it. In self-defence they usually agreed in secret to play with him in relays.

One day, at Gray Gables, a fishing trip, carefully planned with his boy Richard, had to be postponed on account of a storm. He had so arranged matters that there was no work that he could do, and Richard was disappointed. Mr. Cleveland set to work to make him a willow whistle. Now, for half a century or so, he had been given to other tasks than making whistles, so it was not as easy as it once was; but he stuck to it. By tea-time he had a perfect whistle. It made that clear, shrill note so dear to those who like to blow whistles. Nor was the "boy

with a new whistle" the only one who was proud.

When confronted with a new idea, three distinct expressions of countenance marked the three stages of his remarkable ability to get to the heart of a complicated problem and throw aside all the rest. First, there came a somewhat wistful look of perplexity, as if bewildered, almost distressed; second, there was a mental circling around the idea in a receptive attitude of mind; and then, third, a sudden grasping of the idea, never to let go. Commodore Benedict once likened this to a carrier-pigeon when let loose; the hesitancy and the circling round and round, then the sudden, unerring flight straight for home.

VII

ONE day when Mr. Cleveland and a small party of friends were travelling home in a private car,—it was on the return trip from the opening ceremonies of the St. Louis Exposition,—he looked up from his game of cribbage, and said as the train slowed down, "What place is this?"

"This," smiled one of his companions, an old and intimate friend, "is a place called Washington," and just then the dome of the Capitol swung into view, looking its best in the opalescent light of the dying day. The ex-President gazed at it with interest, thinking no doubt of many things.

"How would you like to stop off here for four years more?" asked his old comrade.

Mr. Cleveland kept silent a moment. "Well," he said, shaking his head, "you'd have to drag me back with a rope to get me here," and he went on with his game.

There was just once, according to the friend who related this incident, that he felt otherwise about the matter, and that was during the street railway riots out there in St. Louis; and the only reason he wanted to be President then was to help in putting a quick end to the ill treatment of the women and children. The cry of a child always distressed him. It made him quite miserable sometimes when he was walking through the village. He always wanted to stop and find out what was the matter. He looked pained and puzzled as if wondering why such things had to be.

He was easily moved in other ways. At the annual Commencement exercises at Princeton when the carefully prepared valedictory oration was pronounced to the graduating class by one of its members, the tears always came to his eyes. He loved youth, he enjoyed having so much of it around him. That was one motive, perhaps, in his choice of a college town for his retiring years. "I feel young at seventy," he told the undergraduates when they presented him with the cup referred to,—the last time, by the way, he ever addressed them,—"because I have here breathed the atmosphere of vigorous youth."

He liked young people of all ages. He was much pleased when they manifested their liking for him. There is no reason why this feeling should not

be shown in his own words, addressed to a fifteen year old schoolboy at Lawrenceville.

Princeton, Jan. 8, 1906.

Dear ——: I want to thank you for the beautiful inkstand you gave me on Christmas and to tell you how much I appreciated your remembrance of me. I like the inkstand better than any I have ever had before; and when you are as old as I am, you will know, I am sure, how gratifying it is to feel that there are boys and girls who think the old are worth remembering. With every good holiday wish I am,

Sincerely your friend,

GROVER CLEVELAND

His love of children was not merely an abstract tenderne ; for the inherent beauty and pathos of new life—he liked to have them around; he enjoyed watching them. And they, with the instinctive trust shown by children and animals toward those who really appreciate them, enjoyed being with

him, liked having *him* around. Sometimes he would spend a whole day gravely mending toys, making wooden blocks for paper soldiers, constructing water-wheels. Dean West has told how "The Princeton Bird Club," composed of professors' children and others, decided that the ex-President was worthy of honorary membership to their body. So one day they assembled, and solemnly read an address of welcome to "the Hon. G. Cleveland," who bowed and accepted the honor in a speech which won for him their unqualified approbation.

Callers who came quaking into the presence, thinking, perhaps, "So this is the man who guided the ship of state," must have been surprised when, for instance, Francis, the youngest, a handsome boy of three or four, came

romping in, never dreaming of fear, and remarked to the former President of the United States, "Hello! You've got on a new suit—are those shoes new, too?"

Callers who undertook to inform him to his face what a great President he had been made him exceedingly miserable (though he did not mind reading about it when they were not around); but if you told him you saw his boy Richard make a good catch playing ball as you came in, his whole face lighted up with his kindly smile. His attitude toward children was not the smiling condescension many of the "Olympians" adopt, which children hate; he treated them with that flattering earnestness which children like. "He never descended to their level," as Professor Sloane once put it;

"he rose to it." "Some of the other gentlemen here this afternoon left this bat behind them," he would say to his boy. One day these two were seen walking home together in the rain. Richard was holding the umbrella. Rather than let the boy see that he could not hold it high enough the ex-President walked all the way down Bayard Lane with his head and shoulders bent low.

Once on the train from New York he became much concerned over a little girl who seemed to be travelling alone. Finally he had to go and ask her about it. She said it was all right, she was to be met by her father at New Brunswick. But when that station was finally reached the ex-President, without saying anything to the rest of his party, quietly stole out to

the rear door, and watched until he saw the child safe in her father's arms; then he returned to the group he had left and went on with the conversation as if nothing had happened.

VIII

WHEN Mr. Cleveland accepted the trusteeship of the reorganized Equitable Life Assurance Society, and later became chairman of the Association of Life Insurance Presidents, there was considerable misunderstanding, as was bound to be the case with a man not given to explaining himself. He knew perfectly well that he would be criticized. But he did it, not for the benefit of the insurers, but the insured. He knew that the great bulk of the money invested in insurance by the fifteen million policy-holders was

the hard-earned savings of the common people. He knew that where once they believed everything those in control told them, now, with faith shaken by the scandalous revelations, they were inclined to believe nothing. The very existence of insurance as an institution was threatened. The important loss would be to the people, the loss of the money and the irreparable damage to the spirit of thrift. He believed he could help reëstablish confidence. He knew that he could see to it that that confidence was not misplaced. And the broad view of this was service to the country at large, whether certain wealthy men also benefited by it or not. It was one of the few opportunities left him for further active usefulness to his fellow citizens, and he embraced it, despite the

adverse advice of some of his friends.

Having taken it, he pitched in and worked hard. He had always been interested in the insurance idea, and he became more interested as he studied up the matter in his thorough, painstaking way; just as, when he became trustee of Princeton, he studied the problem of higher education in America from the ground up. "And now," one of the younger insurance presidents used to say, "the old man knows more about insurance than any of us."

Moreover, he was glad of the opportunity to earn by hard work a good salary. He had use for it. Like the absurd lies about his home life, the stories about his private fortune have since been seen—even by those who told them—to be merely imaginary. Surprise was expressed all over the

country at the small amount of his estate when his will was probated. By thrift and simple living throughout a long, arduous career he had accumulated enough to leave his family comfortably off, but by no means rich. The lies were probably started and fed by the imagination of those who look upon everything in life, even the presidency, as a money-making proposition, and who could not quite see themselves resisting the opportunity, for instance, of going short of the market on the day before issuing the Venezuelan message, and thus acquiring a fortune overnight.

There was still another reason why he was glad to do this work—it was because it was work. He believed in wholesome activity, exerting one's God-given faculties; in work for work's

sake, aside from the other normal satisfaction of profiting by one's own labor—not that of others.

That was why he felt so strongly about the anomalous position of "these poor ex-presidents of ours," men trained and habituated for energizing, fitted by remarkable experience for great usefulness, suddenly cast to one side. Long before he was persuaded to sum up his views formally upon the question he used often to talk about it informally. "Something ought to be done," he would say plaintively, shaking his head. "As it is now, nothing seems to be *dignified* enough for them. Now there was Harrison; he went into law. The first time he got up to argue a case in court everybody laughed; it seemed so queer. I know how it is. I went back into law my-

self when I left Washington the first time. I walked into the supreme court, and there on the bench sat two judges I had appointed myself. No, it doesn't do.... So a fellow has to remain a loafer all the rest of his life simply because he happened to be President. It is n't right. It is n't fair."

"Why don't you write about this subject?" was suggested.

"I'd like to—I'd like to very well, only they'd say I was trying to feather my own nest."

When he finally wrote his paper on this important subject he prefaced his discussion by stating that he had enough for his own needs, and that no one should take what he said as a plea in his own behalf. As if any one would!

IN his last years Mr. Cleveland's fig-

ure lost the fulness usually shown in the pictures. His face was seamed and rugged—far stronger and finer-looking than in any of the portraits. His tread became more slow and measured, his daily strolls were shorter, his shooting trips were postponed "until next fall;" but, mentally and physically, he remained a strong man, a big man in every way. His hand was big and gave the feeling of great power when he grasped yours. His gaze was direct and very observant, but not uncomfortably searching. He was one of those who gave the sense of looking for your good points, not your bad ones. His smile was warm, kind, radiant, a benediction. The occasions when I had the memorable privilege of talking with him seem very few, but my last sight of him alive was

with this smile as, turning slowly and heavily to go upstairs, he said: "Good-by."

Cicero in "De Senectute" tells of the pleasures and satisfactions of old age, but his own latter years were saddened with family troubles and embittered by political strife; he met his end at the hands of paid assassins, who found him an unresisting victim, alone at his country seat.

It is rare that we find in history a great public leader whose life was more completely rounded, or whose death was more beautiful, than that of our late President. Full of years, mellow, serene, loved by his friends, revered by his country and admired by the whole world, he died as ordinary people die, in his own home, surrounded

by those he loved most. His death, like his chief characteristics in life, was normal. But for the very reason that he was "a man of common qualities raised to the *n*th power," his example in history should be the more useful to the sons of men.

THE END